

INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF THE USSR Mannhardtstrasse 6 Munich 22, Germany

## SOVIET AFFAIRS ANALYSIS SERVICE

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### THE REBELLIOUS YOUNG SOVIET WRITERS

An interesting Soviet literary phenomenon is the ability of certain young writers to publish "decadent" works, offensive to the arbiters of the Communist way of life.

Particularly intolerable to the literary critics has been the idea, expressed in Yevtushenko's poem "The Nihilist," that a Soviet "zoot-suiter" is capable of an act of heroism.

The group of well-known young Soviet poets including Yevtushenko, which was recently denounced by the Soviet youth organ Komsomolskaya Pravda, has been under continual criticism since 1957 but has persisted in expressing thoughts alien to the Communist way of thinking.

Also, the writings of young Soviet prose writers reflect a growing spirit of non-conformity, characteristic of Soviet youth in its search for a new purpose in life.

In their attacks on these non-conformists, the Soviet critics admit that the young writers feel they are putting into a literary form the thoughts of the Soviet youth as a whole.

It is this confident awareness of responsibility, as well as of support, that gives these literary rebels the courage to carry on their fight for creative freedom.

That they are not entirely suppressed in a totalitarian society is an indication that they command a wide and admiring audience, which has grown too large to be ignored by the Soviet authorities.

CIRCULATION COPY 1

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### THE REBELLIOUS YOUNG SOVIET WRITERS

Many young Soviet writers, chiefly poets, are attacked by critics for pernicious tendencies but continue to get their writings published. This phenomenon indicates considerable support for their rebellious views. Typical of the bitterness permeating the Soviet criticism was an article in January 5, 1961, Komsomolskaya Pravda, which accused such prominent poets as Yevtushenko, Voznesensky, Akhmadulina and Pankratov of presenting Soviet conditions in a false light and of treating human problems and moral questions from an un-Marxist standpoint. Yevtushenko comes under the heaviest fire for his poem "The Nihilist," published in the December 1960 issue of the magazine Yunost (Youth), which shows that a stilyaga, or "zoot-suiter," is capable of an act of heroism. The poem's hero, a student,

..... wore pants that were narrow and tight,  
And he liked to read Hemingway,  
"Your tastes aren't Russian, by right,"  
His father would sourly say,  
He would argue loud and long,  
Didn't mind if they thought he was wrong.  
His family felt his gall,  
Honest producers all.  
He kept them all in a stir,  
His tastes being what they were.  
His family grieved, "Our boy,  
Is a nihilist," they'd moan.  
In saving a comrade's life,  
The nihilist lost his own.  
I've read through his diary,  
He was clean, not a blot of shame,  
It's a mystery to me,  
How he got his nihilist name.

(more)

Affirming, as an absolute law of aesthetics, that a fictional hero has to conform strictly to the official image of what a good Communist must be, the Soviet youth organ rejects "The Nihilist":

We can no more accept, or make excuses for this type of man, who is tainted by the poison of disbelief and by carping over aesthetics, than we can justify, to put it mildly, the peculiar philosophy peddled by the author.

For adopting a scornful attitude toward the Soviet working man, Yevtushenko is compared to those "accomplices of the bourgeois ideologists" who

twist themselves inside out, trying to spread their baleful influence among the Soviet youth.... They dream of corrupting the minds of the young and infecting their hearts with the poison of scepticism, pessimism and nihilism, of sowing in them feeling of anxiety, restlessness and confusion... and of palming off onto them the shoddy ideals of bourgeois-Philistine ways of thought, instead of lofty aims (Komsomolskaya Pravda, January 5, 1961).

The article is also indignant that poems such as "The Nihilist" can find their way into the Soviet press at all:

There is no way of understanding or excusing the attitude adopted by some of our publications toward this type of literature... With incomprehensible thoughtlessness, magazines print trashy anti-artistic material (Ibid.).

That young Soviet poets who sin against the Party line actually appear in print is extremely significant. "The Nihilist," for example, appeared after a full year of discussion in the press about what a real hero should be like. None of Yevtushenko's poems accompanying "The Nihilist" in the December 1960 Yunost ("The First Typist," the brief and proud "Russian Talents," "Muska," "The Barrier," etc.) is devoted to the prescribed Party propaganda themes. Yevtushenko has been continually criticized for various transgressions of the Soviet art. As far back as 1959, Komsomolskaya Pravda had described his poems as "decidedly alien to the whole spirit of Soviet literature" and as "resurrecting the images of bourgeois poetry," especially those in which he refers to the eternal burden of suffering borne by the Russian people (September 20).

(more)

The other poets attacked in the January 1961 Komsomolskaya Pravda article -- Bella Akhmadulina, Andrei Voznesensky and Yuri Pankratov -- were in trouble even as students at the Moscow Literary Institute in 1957. In September of that year Literaturnaya Gazeta (Literary Gazette, September 12, 1957) directed its fire at them, and at Yuri Pankratov in particular:

...After writing imperfect but optimistic verse, he has suddenly renounced his youthful romanticism and his unpretentious view of the world, and has begun adopting a different tone.... Unfortunately, Pankratov is not alone in this. Another student at the Literary Institute, B. Akhmadulina, has also begun composing decadent verse. These dangerous and harmful tendencies are manifest in the work of the young poet I. Kharabarov.

One of Kharabarov's poems was highly daring in content:

Rusted, iron-souled people, who seek to suffocate me  
with their lifeless hands.

They wish that I, like they, should forget I am a human  
being.

Here echo hopeful cries, and all is black at night: ter-  
rifying people made of iron -- their minds immutable.

I am setting forth alone to pit myself against their  
countless hordes... (Komsomolskaya Pravda, April 28,  
1957).

The authorities are at a loss to explain how such "ugly" ideas about Soviet society as those expressed in the above poem come to be voiced by young people who are Komsomol members.

It was in 1957, too, after Bella Akhmadulina had openly proclaimed her "apolitical" attitude, and Kharabarov had demanded the right to creative freedom, that Komsomolskaya Pravda wrote:

Their views and, incidentally all apolitical views, appear highly improper in the light of the most elementary Soviet morals.... In their opinion, the task of poetry is to express narrow, intimate, personal experiences of the heart, irrespective of whether society shares these opinions or not... Stop interfering with us, these "innovators" say to society.... Let us live as we want... If you will not let us..., it is nothing less than suppression of creative freedom. (Ibid.).

(more)

In their attacks, the Party critics admit that all these young poets consider that they are expressing the thoughts of Soviet youth as a whole: "Unfortunately, petty and even vulgar works are being produced by Bella Akhmadulina and certain other poets. And they even regard themselves as expressing the aspirations and feelings of Soviet young people (Ibid.).

The youth journal Smena (New Generation) has carried stories by young Soviet prose writers which faithfully reflect the spirit of non-conformity characteristic of Soviet youth in its search for a new purpose in life. Literaturnaya Gazeta (October 10, 1960) commented on them as follows:

In literary works published this year in the prose section of the journal Smena, an ugly tendency has become particularly marked, especially on the part of the young writers. The positive hero, on whose shoulders rests the most vital, most noble but at the same time most difficult task -- that of educating mankind -- has vanished from the pages of the journal. In it there remain pernicious and feeble characters... people without ideals, without will and without aspirations. (October 10, 1960).

It is the knowledge that they speak for the Soviet youth and the confident awareness of the popularity and the support which they enjoy that give these rebels the courage to carry on their fight for creative freedom. It is also interesting, incidentally, to note that many of these young poets contribute, with considerable risk, to certain illegal Soviet literary publications, to which Izvestia itself referred in an article on September 2, 1960; see Soviet Affairs Analysis Service No. 6.1960/61.

The question arises: How is it that under a totalitarian regime these independent-minded writers manage to publish their heretical work in the official press, and not only in unauthorized publications? The answer probably lies in the fact that they are highly gifted and command a wide and admiring audience of persons who share the ideas they express and whom the Soviet authorities can no longer ignore. Also, it must be remembered that these poets are not at all unpatriotic: Their poetry contains much of the old pre-revolutionary great-Russian nationalist spirit, which cannot be displeasing to the ears of the Party.

The younger Soviet literary generation, which has never known the savage censorship of the Stalin era, does not share the fear of victimization which paralyzes the creativity of many of the older writers, and is evidently prepared to go on fighting for recognition of the values in which it believes.